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6 May 1969

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: NSC/IG/LA Special Meeting on Bolivia
on 2 May

1. The NSC/IG/LA met in special session on Friday, 2 May, to discuss the serious problems arising in Bolivia following the sudden death of President Rene Barrientos. Assistant Secretary of State for American Republics Affairs, Charles Meyer, was in the chair. He had just returned from La Paz where he attended the funeral services for Barrientos.
2. Secretary Meyer had praise for CIA's reporting during this crisis period.
3. It was the consensus that military leaders were, at least for now, behind Armed Forces Chief, General Ovando. No known leader is in actual opposition. In time some might develop. The military would probably be able to squelch any student or labor disorders should Ovando decide to oust President Siles, but the pot would then really be boiling and opposition would develop against Ovando. Meanwhile, Ovando is expected -- indeed he told General Westmoreland here prior to Barrientos' death that he would -- take harsh retaliation against students and labor and that he would not tolerate such leftist opposition.
4. Nevertheless, all agreed that any truce between Ovando and Siles was an uneasy one. Secretary Meyer offered 3-2 odds that Siles wouldn't last his term -- which ends on 6 August 1970. The JCS representative said he would lay 3-2 odds that Ovando wouldn't take over -- that Ovando wouldn't want to soil the uniform by such action. (He probably forgot or ignored the fact that Ovando and Barrientos took over a constitutional government by ousting President Paz.)

NSC & STATE Dept.
review(s) completed.

JCS review(s)
completed.

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5. The question of recognition of a Bolivian government if Ovando moves to oust Siles. Some felt rapid recognition was needed. Mr. Vaky, NSC staffer for Latin America, felt a more cautious look should be made since this would be the first coup since President Nixon came to office and all Latin America as well as the US Congress and press would view whatever action taken as the policy of our new administration. He felt we should follow Resolution 26 of the 1965 OAS meeting in Rio -- consultation, etc. is involved prior to recognition. Mr. Vaky did feel, however, that we should develop a more meaningful recognition of unconstitutional changes of government.

6. There was a brief discussion of what happens if Ovando merely forces President Siles to resign. Article 93 of the constitution is a bit vague. It does seem, however, that the line of succession immediately is for the President of the Senate to be next in line, followed by the President of the Chamber of Deputies, followed by the chief of the Supreme Court. It is not entirely clear that Siles resignation would require an immediate call for elections -- this part of the constitution is vague and probably was so designed. If Ovando took over, however, he would have to change the constitution in order to run in an election as a President cannot succeed himself. This, of course, is not an insurmountable task.

7. The IG requested the OEP representative to ask that there be no commercial sales of tin from the US stock piles for the coming six months and then review the situation at that time. Dumping of tin on the market at this time or at the time of a coup would have political overtones we would like to avoid.

8. The IG made the following decisions: instruct the Ambassador to approach Ovando and tell him again of the importance the US places on constitutional government but not to make any threats -- a policy of moral suasion, so to speak. It also asked OEP not to make commercial sales from the tin stockpile. It asked ambassador to review the

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9. The undersigned passed out a memorandum, "General Alfredo Ovando Candis -- the Next President of Bolivia", which OCI prepared in a hurry on the morning of 2 May. This was well received and was referred to several times during the discussion.

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